

## GREEN FARMING

## Green Infra Seeking \$150 Million for Wind Farms

## Congress Slow to Approve Green Bill

FRESNO, Calif. — There's a land rush of sorts going on across the nation's most productive farming region, but these buyers don't want to grow crops. They want to plant solar farms.

With California mandating that 33 percent of electricity be generated from renewables by the end of the decade, there are 227 proposed solar projects in the pipeline statewide. Coupled with wind and other renewables they would generate enough electricity to meet 100 percent of California's power needs on an average summer day, the California Independent System Operator says.

And new applications for projects keep arriving.

Developers are flocking to flat farmland near power transmission lines, but agriculture interests, environmental groups and even the state are concerned that there is no official accounting of how much of this important agricultural region's farmland is being taken out of production.

"We've been trying to get a handle on the extent of this for quite a while now," said Ed Thompson of American Farmland Trust, which monitors how much of the nation's farmland is absorbed by development.

The California Department of Conservation, which is supposed to track development on privately held farmland, has been unable to do so because of staff and funding reductions, officials say.



"I'd love to say we have all of that information, but we really don't," said Molly Penberth, manager of the land resource protection division. "We're going to play catch up getting that information, particularly in the San Joaquin Valley."

Planning department records in four of the valley's biggest farming counties show about 100 solar generation plants already proposed on roughly 40,000 acres, or about the

County boards of supervisors are attracted to the promise of clean energy construction jobs. Some of the projects are on prime land as small as 20 acres, some on habitat shared by threatened or endangered species such as the kit fox, Swainson's hawk and blunt nose lizard. The 9,000-acre Maricopa Sun project in western Kern County is on prime land that the county says lacks a reliable water supply.